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SUBJECT: DAS ROSEMARY DICARLO'S MEETINGS WITH EU OFFICIALS
ON THE BALKANS

Classified By: USEU Political Military Officer Jeremy Brenner for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. According to EU Council and Commission officials, there can be no "shortcut" to EU membership for the countries of the Western Balkans, although their European perspective remains the long-term goal. Kai Eide is "gloomy" and disappointed with what he has seen of the standards implementation. The direction of the Commission report due in November on Macedonia's progress (the "avis") remains undecided. The Montenegro referendum is "inevitable" and may produce negative effects just as the Kosovo status is heating up. Albanian elections were "partially in compliance" with international standards, but the initial ODHIR assessment was too harsh. End summary.

Kosovo and the Standards Review

12. (C) EUR DAS for South Central Europe, Rosemary DiCarlo, met July 18 with Stephan Lehne of the EU Council Secretariat and Reinhart Priebe of the Commission for a tour d'horizon of the Balkans. Lehne noted the July 19-20 visit to Belgrade by EU SG/HR Solana, saying that Solana would impress upon Kostunica and Tadic the need for participation by the K-Serbs in the Kosovo political process. He said that Special Envoy Kai Eide was "gloomy" and "disappointed" by what he has seen of the standards implementation in Kosovo on his initial visits. Lehne said that the message to the Kosovars has to be that they should not take the review process for granted and that the outcome is not a foregone conclusion. Lehne said that the standards review should be a "fitness test" for the Kosovars, and now is the time for them to prove their capacity for positive change. Lehne lamented that Eide and SRSG Jessen-Petersen do not work well together -- in part because Eide's review is seen as an examination of UNMIK's work.

13. (C) Lehne said that there are two options for the outcome of Eide's report. The first would be to delay the start of status talks, and to try to use conditionality as leverage for improvements. The second option would be to recognize that implementation of the standards has not been good, but that it is time to move ahead with status negotiations anyway. Lehne favors the second option, saying that there is little to be gained by further conditionality on the review, and that the lack of status is in itself inhibiting movement. He cautioned that a delay in the start of status negotiations could be "risky," and only the negotiations could generate the political impetus needed for progress. When asked about possible candidates for the position of Special Envoy for the negotiations, Lehne replied that of the several names circulating, the one he hears mentioned most often is that of former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari. In Lehne's view, one of Ahtisaari's strengths is that he can -- and does -- speak to heads of state on an equal footing.

Montenegro Referendum

14. (C) Lehne characterized the referendum as an "inevitable issue," and said that he feared the worst case outcome. In Lehne's view, the worst result would be if President Djukonovic were to hold a referendum in April 2006 "on his own terms" that was boycotted by the opposition. Djukonovic would declare a victory, the opposition would reject it as illegitimate, thereby causing major problems for the International Community just at the "hottest stage" of the Kosovo process. Lehne said that Djukonovic had "hinted" that he might be willing to postpone the referendum until September 2006 if the IC could "deliver" participation by the SNP. Lehne called for agreement on the rules of the game, committing both sides to accept the results of the voting as legitimate. His fear is that Djukonovic will conclude that he has the necessary votes on the ground, and will proceed without the IC -- thereby provoking the worst-case outcome that Lehne believes most likely.

Enlargement outlook

15. (C) Both Priebe and Lehne cautioned that there could be no "shortcuts" to EU membership for the countries of the Western Balkans. Priebe was especially adamant that it is out of the question to lower criteria for membership. Priebe emphasized that the European perspective for the region remained, as was reiterated in statements by the June European Council. He said that the burden of proof has shifted as a result of the no votes on the Constitutional treaty, so that it is up to the countries concerned to demonstrate to the citizens of the EU that they would not import instability and crime if they enter the union. He said it is very important for the Kosovars to understand that the standards review process is not a substitute for meeting the much more demanding Copenhagen criteria. Priebe also noted the high expectations among the Kosovars for significant economic assistance from the EU and the International Community more generally.

Macedonia -- Commission Report

16. (C) Lehne characterized the Commission as "not hugely happy" with progress in Skopje. The Commission's Priebe said that the "avis" to be delivered in November would be a test case for the region in that it would be a "fair assessment" designed to give an encouraging signal to Macedonia, but it was too early to predict which way the decision would go. Both officials noted that the name issue is "getting in the way," though Lehne did not believe that Athens would veto Macedonia's candidate status over the issue.

Albanian Elections

17. (C) Priebe anticipates that the final ODHIR report on the Albanian elections will find that there was "partial compliance" with international electoral standards, reflecting the fact that in the Balkans there are few clear answers but only shades of grey. Priebe suggested that the preliminary report was too harsh in its findings. There are no plans to suspend Albania's Stabilization and Association Agreement.

Bosnia

18. (C) Lehne said that HR Ashdown expects the police reform process to move forward, based on signals from the RS of a willingness to reach a compromise. Priebe said that the EU would like to open negotiations of a Stabilization and Association Agreement, but lack of movement on police reform and public broadcasting is preventing it. Priebe said that the successor to Lord Ashdown should not have -- or at least not exercise -- the Bonn powers. They each cited the impending tenth anniversary of the Dayton accords, with Priebe observing that the Constitutional system as it exists in Bosnia is unworkable and inconsistent with EU integration. He called for Bosnian ownership of the political process, and an openness to consideration of Constitutional reform.

19. (U) DAS DiCarlo has cleared this message.

McKinley

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